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"A Notable Contribution to the field of American Biography"

Abraham Lincoln And His Presidency

BY JOSEPH HARTWELL BARRETT, LL.D.

First Biographer of Lincoln

WITH PORTRAITS, UNPUBLISHED LETTERS
OF LINCOLN, CHASE AND OTHERS : :

TWO VOLUMES. OCTAVO. OVER EIGHT
HUNDRED PAGES. CLOTH, GILT TOPS

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IT IS believed that Mr. Barrett's long expected Life of Lincoln will fill an important place in the list of biographies of this remarkable man. While it is true that many able writers have contributed their aid to the elucidation of the mystery of Lincoln's personality, any new light upon the subject is welcomed by the public. Especially interesting is a new point of view. The biographies of Lincoln that have appeared heretofore have in most cases been limited in their scope. The encyclopaedic work of his two secretaries, to which too much praise cannot be given, is, as its title indicates, a history; and its very comprehensiveness making it invaluable, as a work of reference, but limits its field. Other biographies are more reminiscential or anecdotal, than systematic efforts to present the many-sided character of Lincoln and his relations to the crisis of national life of his time. A most admirable study refers solely to Lincoln the statesman and necessarily omits full treatment of Lincoln as a personality—unique among men. Others magnify the importance on the one hand of portraits or on the other of humorous stories mostly legendary, and zeal in collecting historical material is mistaken for true historical sense.

The biographies written in the years just succeeding Lincoln's death, while in most cases the work of personal acquaintance, lack the historical perspective given to the writer of today, and in no case are they the work of men of affairs, while the later books show the lack of the personal touch that acquaintance with Lincoln alone could give. Each however has helped and it is without any purpose of disparaging the work of others that Mr. Barrett's claim to a distinctive point of view is urged.

The author was a public man, thoroughly familiar with the political questions of the day, during the years that witnessed Lincoln's rise to national prominence. He was the political editor of the Cincinnati Gazette from

1857 to 1861, a delegate to the Republican National Convention of 1860 and Ohio's member of the Platform Committee. Immediately after the nomination he visited Springfield to obtain material for the preparation of a campaign life of Lincoln. Here he became well acquainted with the latter's personality and received from him much help and encouragement. The book published in the following June was revised for the campaign of 1864, and later, after Lincoln's death, a third edition was published.

The biography now offered to the public is an entirely new work but it has the advantage of the contemporary point of view of the earlier life of the author combined with that of the matured judgment gained by years of study and the clearer insight afforded by the lapse of time. Lincoln's career can only be understood from the standpoint of the contemporary observer familiar with the conditions of public life while the position that he will occupy in history must be judged after the lapse of years. Mr. Barrett carries the reader through the formative years of Lincoln's youth, presenting his character from every side so that the influences that placed him in his pre-eminent position among men can be better realized. One sees Lincoln grow and understands the reason for the growth. Then the critical period of his political career and the climax of his life are considered from every point of view. The incidents of the war, with its diplomatic and political entanglements are presented thoroughly and with clearness. The reader is put in the position of the men of that day familiar with the problems as they were then presented, and having also the advantage of knowing the secret influences that were of importance. This contemporaneous point of view aids the critical retrospect very materially and enables one to form an unusually definite conception of Lincoln. Whether it be a correct one or not is of course a problem impossible of solution. The mystery of Lincoln can never be solved, but Mr. Barrett at least places the reader in a position that fits him for an understanding of the nature of the problem.

Mr. Barrett aims to represent with adequate completeness and in reasonable compass Lincoln's personal career, the leading historical events in which he took an important part and his best written and spoken words. He contributes much new and valuable material including unpublished letters of Lincoln, Chase and others, new anecdotes illustrative of Lincoln's character, and corrections of many errors of fact and inference that have gained general currency. The work is animated by a lofty purpose and is a notable contribution to the field of American biography and history.

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